Rt. 8, Frederick, Md. 21701
1/24/75

Mr. Seymour Hersh
New York Times Washington Bureau
1920 L St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Hersh,

When the appointment of David Belin to head the new whitewashing commission was leaked to the Star-News, I phoned you. When you did not return that call, for the second time on this story, I presumed that you suffer the typical journalistic prejudice about all rather than some called "conspiracy theorists" and did not call back.

I am not now and never have been such a "theorist." And I can conceive of other reasons for your not returning the call that you might have believed persuasive.

Shortly after this my young friend Howard Roffman told me he intended calling to your attention his dialogue with Belin, based in part on my published work and of that in part on the suppressed story of Carolyn Arnold.

For purposes of that correspondence as I remember it Howard took a more restricted approach than I would. He also is unaware that experienced reporters tend to take a jaundiced view of the world, public figures, politicians and official investigators. He likewise may not be fully aware despite his own exceptional work how justified this view of those of whom they write is to reporters. However, because I believe that Belin's record exceeds the corrupt norm, I take the time to tell you what I anticipate Howard may not have.

Belin was not the only Commission lawyer of Nixonian view. He was one, perhaps the only one, of these who had avoided controversy about himself of any magnitude. (What he did with Sylvia Meagher and The Texas Observer is, I believe, reprehensible but it attracted little attention. And his book, published by a Times subsidiary and plugged hard by the Times, resulted in no serious public criticism.)

Although my own experience is that the press could not care less about official perjury and its subornation - repeated cases I established in court went unreported - I call your attention to this Texas Observer business because Mrs. Meagher reported that in effect if not in fact Belin suborned the perjury of a witness named Givens. Belin had an FBI report of an interview with Givens in which Givens said other than officials wanted of him. Givens had been arrested and was vulnerable to police pressure. Belin ignored what Givens had told the FBI and other also conradictory versions he had given and ended up with precisely the falsehood that was essential to framing a case against Oswald.

The part of the Carolyn Arnold story I believe Howard did not find necessary to his correspondence with Belin relates to this. The Commission had to ignore all the evidence that Oswald could not have fired a short from that rifle and that window. This meant it had to pretend that nobody had seen him for the crucial period, I believe from 11:55 a.m. until a conjectured three minutes after the assassination. They knew this was false. The FBI did not dare suppress the evidence entirely. Instead it corrupted what Mrs. Arnold told it, reporting falsely that she had seen Oswald at about 12:15 and on the first floor. However, Mrs. Arnold actually reported seeing Oswald on that first floor at about 12:25. There is corroboration, some in my first book. These FBI reports are in the third, Photographic Whitewash, in facsimile. The importance of 12:25 rather than 12:15 is that there would otherwise have been the problem of getting Oswald back to that alleged sniper's nest on the 6th floor with enough time to reassemble the alleged murder weapon and still be on time for his alleged rendezvous with destiny. When it took an experienced FBI agent six minutes merely to reassemble the rifle and it took other time to get up there unseen and retrieve the rifle unseen and build the nest unseen and then do the shooting, the need the Commission faced and Belin did more than a normal share of addressing is, I hope,

not entirely invisible.

Belin addressed it in his handling, which means getting corrupted evidence from, other witnesses. One of these was a very young married woman, a high-school kid whose husband had to be destroyed as a witness. They are the Rowlands. I deal with this in my second book. My treatment is also an exposition of how the FBI meets such problems. In any event, what Belin did includes refusing to permit Mrs. Rowland correct misleading testimony he had led her into while altering his own questioning. My chapter "None So Blind," as I recall after so many years, concludes with facsimile reproduction of the typescript of the transcript later printed without Mrs. Rowland's necessary correction. But with Belin's stylistic change of his own words. As I remember it Belin was cunning enough to use the corrected testimony in the Report, which is what attracted attention, attention the enormity of 26 volumes buried and at a time when it was not expected that 26 such volumes would be published anyway. (Yes, I have the once-secret executive sessions at which these matters were discussed.) In the Report what Mrs. Rowland was really saying is invisible.

There is more but I think this is enough for you to decide whether Belin is no more than normally dishonest for a public official and whether he is the kind of lawyer from whom anything that can be called an investigation without blushing can be expected. If you want to see how he handled a witness whose testimony really means that evidence was planted with care, see what he did - complete with sense of humor when a President is assassinated - with Domingo Benavides, in my first book.

At this point and several hours ago I was interrupted by a call from a reporter whose paper and syndicate are breaking a story I had in mind when I left the first message for you. It is, however, only one of the things I then had in mind. Some of your sources and probably those whose interest can be guessed were less than completely forthright with you. I am familiar enough with your work not to believe the alternative, that you lied. However, with the passing of time I am not now disposed to give away in what I could have regarded as the public interest what is a major part of an almost completed draft of a book <u>not</u> on political assassinations.

Belin is not all I had in mind on the second call. However, he is all that Howard mentioned to me several weeks ago. I do have an interest in Howard and how he may be regarded by those of influence in the press. I feel of him as a father does of a son. He has a book now overdue and another accepted with pub date either not set or not communicated to me. The second was completed during his undergraduate days. The first was drafted when he was in high school. However he may have come accross to you if as he indicated he got in touch with you, in my opinion he is an exceptionally gifted and exceptionally principled young man. I would be happier if unreasoned prejudice did not wash off on him.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

HR: I see no possibilities at all in a polite approach, no reason for an ~~xpln~~ apologetic one, am not about to cater to his unthinking prejudices, want to capture his attention with a challenge, and resent the inherent arrogance of his preconceptions.

P.S. If you have any interest in the FBI story, I got a good laugh out of the White House line that Ford really does not know if the FBI has a file on him. Today's WxPost. When I know that Ford saw to it that they do in using them in a cheap, hoked-up "clearance" of himself during the days of his Belin association (see Whitewash II), I also know that FBI leaks could embarrass the President of the United States.

I am not sending copies of my books because the Times has all of them; because when it was listing "Books Received" it pretended that mine did not exist, having no commercial imprint (I billed them for the <u>14th</u> copy of the first!); because of the unconscionable way it treated my work on the King assassination (which among other things has established the need for a trial, provided a defense and led to a new principle of law also not reported by the Times although it is presently before the Supreme Court); and because I do not believe you will see a story.